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## **Homa: Tantric Fire Ritual**

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### Summary and Keywords

The homa is a votive offering involving the construction of a fire in a hearth-altar, and the immolation of offerings in the fire. The altar is homologized with a mandala, and as with other ritual uses of mandalas, the deity evoked in the course of the ritual is located at the mandala's center, and in this case identified with the fire itself. As a tantric ritual, the practitioner is also ritually identified with both the deity and the fire, and the offerings made into the fire are the spiritual obstacles that impede the practitioner from full awakening. Tantric homas are generally categorized according to different functions or goals, such as protection, subduing adversaries, and so on. As a form of individual practice conducive to awakening, the practitioner's own inherent wisdom is identified with the fire, and just as the offerings are transformed and purified, the practitioner's own spiritual obstacles are as well.

Ritualized activities of maintaining and making fire are some of the most ancient forms of social coordination, which is essential to the development of the human species. Such ritualization would seem to be the basis for fire cults, forms of which are known throughout the world's religions. In the scope of Indo-European religions, similarities of practice and symbolism provide a shared background to the homa per se. More directly, there appear to be both Vedic and Indo-Iranian traditions of ritual praxis that converge in the tantric homa.

The homa is found in all of the Indic tantric traditions: Buddhist, Śaiva, and Jain. Once established as part of tantric practice, the homa was spread throughout Central, East, and Southeast Asia, particularly in its Buddhist form. This transmission of ritual practice engaged local traditions wherever it spread. Tibetan tantric traditions developed an extensive literature of homa rituals, and from there the practice also influenced Mongolian fire rituals as well. In China, interaction between tantric Buddhism and Daoism led to the creation of a homa devoted to the Northern Dipper, a figure unknown in Indian sources of Buddhist tantra. Two similar examples are found in Japan. The Shintō traditions of Yuiitsu (or Yoshida) and Miwa modified the tantric Buddhist form for the worship of a selection of Shintō deities. Similarly, the tradition of mountain asceticism, Shugendō, also adopted the homa and adapted it to its purposes. As a result of the repression of Buddhism in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the Shintō forms are no longer extant, though in the present many Shintō shrines perform rituals of various kinds in which fire plays an important role. In contrast, the Shugendō homa, sometimes as a prelude to fire-walking, remains an active part of Japanese religion into the present day.

The tantric homa has been interpreted in a variety of ways, reflecting the multifaceted character of fire itself. There are two important strains of interpretation. One is the yogic interiorization of ritual found in post-Vedic Indian religion, more as a form of esoteric physiology than as a psychologized understanding of visualization. While closely related to yogic interiorization of ritual, the sexual symbolisms that are attached to all aspects of the fire rituals constitute a second strain of interpretation. These symbolic associations are important for their role in understanding tantric notions of ritual efficacy, which require greater nuance of understanding than can be attained by simply categorizing such practices as magic.

Keywords: tantric Buddhism, Indo-European, Indo-Iranian, Vedic, sexual symbolism, ritual efficacy, Tibet, Northern Dipper, Shinto, Shugendo

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## Homa: Fire Offerings in a Tantric Mode

While there are a vast range of rituals in which fire plays a prominent role, one of the unique aspects of the homa is that it serves as an effective marker of tantric movements. It is a ritual practice that is shared by all such movements, and is found across the entire extent of the tantric world. The ritual minimally involves making offerings into fire, a practice found in many religious traditions. However, what distinguishes the practice of the homa is that the offerings are made within the context of a conceptual and symbolic ritual system that is identifiably tantric in nature. This includes such elements as the use of symbolic hand gestures (*mudrā*), use of verbal expressions based on Sanskrit (*mantra*), and geometric diagrams in which the deities are either made present or represented (*mandala*, and *yantra*). These and other individual elements that might be taken as markers of tantric practice<sup>1</sup> are found in a variety of religious traditions both within India and well beyond. However, a focus on individual religious elements as defining characteristics of tantra, or alternatively considering a list of such elements offered in the spirit of a polythetic definition, cannot indicate the systematic character of tantra—or any other religious tradition.<sup>2</sup>

Instead of focusing on the individual elements, an examination of tantric practice—especially one as emblematic of tantra as is the homa—provides a quite natural basis for seeing tantra as an integral, coherent system.<sup>3</sup> For example, in the Japanese Shingon tradition, this offering is set within a key concept of tantric ideology, that of ritual identification between the deity evoked, the hearth-altar, and the practitioner. Far from being an isolated element in a list of characteristics, this provides one point of entrée into the system of tantric thought, which ramifies into cosmology, philosophical anthropology, ritual efficacy, theories of language, and symbolic systems. As in the course of its history the homa has spread out of the Indian subcontinent to many different religious cultures, it also engages the same range of topics in those several religious cultures as well.

## Origins and History: Fire, Cult, and the Origins of the Human

There is a reasonable argument to be made for associating the origin of humans as social animals with fire. Fire-keeping is perhaps the oldest form of collective human behavior, an activity requiring coordination among several different members of a group.<sup>4</sup> Benoît Dubreuil has pointed out, for example, that cooked food requires the collection of large amounts of firewood. This in turn implies a division of labor, that is, cooperation both in cooking and in fuel gathering.<sup>5</sup> Fire-keeping (both maintenance and containment)<sup>6</sup> is thought to have preceded the ability to make fire by many millenia. Estimates for the use of fire range from 300,000 years ago at the most conservative to as much as 1.5 million years ago.<sup>7</sup> We note that both fire-keeping and fire-making were so important as to require the ritualization of behaviors, thus assuring that the correct actions would be carried out. It seems most likely that it is this kind of ritualized practice<sup>8</sup> that lies at the heart of fire cults.

## Breadth of Traditions Employing the Homa

### Indo-European Fire Cult

The analysis of Indo-European religions suggests that there was a common set of practices related to fire.<sup>9</sup> These are found in both Roman and Greek ritual praxis, as well as in Indo-Iranian and Vedic cultures. There are several specific continuities between the Greco-Roman use of fire and the tantric. For example, different kinds of fires have differently shaped hearths—see section VEDIC AND INDO-IRANIAN for the details of the tantric Buddhist associations of hearth-shape and ritual function. In Rome, the fires for Vesta, goddess of the domestic realm, were kept on a circular hearth. Among the three fires of Vedic practice, the domestic fire (*gārhapatīya*) is also maintained on a circular hearth. Iranian practice also employed three hearths, the domestic one being circular. And in tantric Buddhist practice, the fire for protection (*śāntika*) is built on a circular hearth as well. The association between the concept of the domestic and the function of protection is a suggestive, if not perfect, match.

In Roman, Vedic, and tantric traditions, fire is conceived as the agency by which offerings are carried from this world to the gods, and are at the same time purified. In the Vedic tradition, fire is also anthropomorphized as Agni. Agni is a multiform deity found both in beneficent forms, such as the cooking fire and ritual fire, and in destructive forms, such as wildfires and the cremation fire—though the latter is also ambivalent as that which first purifies and then carries the deceased to the realm of the ancestors. Similarly in

Vedic ritual Agni purifies the offerings made into a fire, and transmits them to the deities. Not only is Agni a deity symbolically key to Vedic rituals employing fire, but he is also to tantric homa as well. In Japan, both the Tendai and Shingon traditions of tantric Buddhism employ the figure of Agni (J. Katen, 火天, literally “fire god”). He is most usually the first deity evoked in a sequence of offerings.<sup>10</sup>

Across this range of traditions, the symbolic homologies of fire with a variety of bodily functions are also similar. Thus, fire is likened to sexuality, to digestion, and to breath. Associations specifically between the fire ritual and sexuality themselves constitute a wide symbolic range. In Greek tradition, the hearth of Hestia is considered feminine, while the fire in the hearth is itself masculine. A different pairing of symbolic associations regards the widespread technology of making fire by means of a “fire drill.” This involves a flat board laid on the ground that has a depression into which a vertical stick is placed and rapidly rotated. The friction creates heat that causes fine shavings or grass to catch a flame, which is then fed. In Vedic interpretations, the flat board and the vertical stick are feminine and masculine, respectively. By analogy with the symbolism of sexual intercourse, desire (*kāma*) is identified with inner heat (*tapas*), which is itself produced ritually, especially through yogic practices.

Another analogy is made between the ritual fire and digestion, and indeed one of the forms of Agni is the digestive fire. Just as a person consumes food and digests it, so the ritual fire consumes offerings and transforms them into the food of the gods.<sup>11</sup> Just as digestion has been homologized with fire, so has the breath. One such instance is the transformation of the twice-daily *agnihotra* ritual into an interior ritual, the *prāṇāgnihotra*. In the *prāṇāgnihotra*, which may also be understood as a kind of yogic practice, the breath takes the place of the external ritual. Having become qualified to perform the *agnihotra*, a brahman is enjoined to perform it twice each day. This continuity of twice-daily performance is then equated with the continuity of the breath.

This brief summary indicates how widely the symbolic and ritual practices that form the historical background to the tantric homa are spread across the full range of Indo-European religious tradition. However, the homa per se appears to derive more specifically from both Vedic and Indo-Iranian sources.

## Vedic and Indo-Iranian

Much of the literature on the historical development of the homa leaves the impression of a simple linear sequence beginning with the Vedic practices and then—in some as yet to be identified fashion—transforming into the tantric form, that is, the homa. Vedic rites are commonly segregated into two kinds, the *śrauta* and the *grhya*, often rendered as solemn and household (or domestic), respectively. The two kinds differ in several ways. Whereas the solemn rites generally require three fires (or more in the case of such major rites as the *agnicayana*),<sup>12</sup> the household rites require only one. Solemn rites employ the services of several priests, the household rites only one—generally not the householder as such,

but rather the household priest. Similarly, while the fire is referred to as the household fire, it is not the cooking fire in the kitchen, but rather a separate fire in the family shrine room.<sup>13</sup> The similarity between the household rites and the homa—single fire, one practitioner—and the fact that such rites would have been very widely known in medieval India, suggest that these may have been the model upon which the homa was developed. As yet, however, no study connecting any specific household rite and the homa has established a clear relation.<sup>14</sup>

Holly Grether has noted that while “the *homa* of the tantric schools share certain features with the Brahmanical rites that evolve in the Vedic tradition, it more closely parallels the development of the ritual paradigm in the Zoroastrian tradition.”<sup>15</sup> She suggests that there are several layers involved in creating the similarities. First are the well-established commonalities of Vedic ritual and early Zoroastrian, which she claims indicate diffusion from a common source.<sup>16</sup> More specifically she suggests direct Zoroastrian influences on the formation of the tantric homa. She argues that “Elements of *homa* such as the structure of the rite, role of the main priest, ritual implements used, *mantric* recitation, and the mesocosmic function of the ritual space are to be counted among those that are shared with the sacrifice (*yasna*) of the Zoroastrians.”<sup>17</sup> Grether has highlighted, in particular, one of the consistent patterns in Indo-Iranian and Indo-European fire rituals, that is, both the homa and its antecedents, as the ritual framing of fire by water—sequences of ritual acts involving the use of water. She argues that “most Asian fire rites have a symmetrical frame structure, with water sequences framing the central fire offering. This basic structure characterizes early Vedic and Avestan sacrifices, as well as medieval and contemporary fire rituals across Asia.”<sup>18</sup> The argument that these symbolic and formal similarities indicate a formative Zoroastrian influence on the development of the tantric homa is supported by the history of Buddhism in Gandhāra.

Located in the northwest corner of the subcontinent, in what is now Pakistan, Gandhāra was close to Bactria, the home of Zoroastrianism, and was ruled as part of the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom (c. 250 to 125 BCE), and then as part of the Indo-Greek Kingdom (c. 180 BCE to 10 CE). A Buddhist presence in the area of Gandhāra dates from the time of Aśoka (r. c. 268–232 BCE), who had rock edicts inscribed in the region. Trade routes that provided contact between the cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean (Hellenistic), Iran, India, and Central Asia ran through Gandhāra. In his study of Gandhāran art, Giovanni Verardi argues for Gandhāra as the locale for early adoption of the homa into Buddhist practice, first as an accommodation for Buddhist laity and then as a monastic rite.<sup>19</sup> It is this latter that Verardi sees as then becoming an esoteric and tantric rite within Buddhism, one performed by a *vajrācārya*.<sup>20</sup> During the period examined by Verardi, the local religious culture would have continued to be deeply influenced by Zoroastrian practices. Although Verardi considers only Vedic and Brahmanic influences in this early adoption of homa into Buddhist practice, Grether’s analyses serve to complement those with indigenous Zoroastrian influences as well. An additional factor in the development of tantric homa in Northwest India was the Śaivite tradition.<sup>21</sup>

### Śaiva

The Śaiva Siddhānta homa as found in texts such as the *Somaśambhupaddhati* exemplifies fire ritual practices on the subcontinent during the medieval period (c. 500–1200).<sup>22</sup> In contrast to the now-common term “Hindu,” Dominic Goodall has suggested that “various soteriologies and schools of thought might be enumerated, but three streams are commonly separated out: Vedic orthodoxy, and those of the heterodox Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas.”<sup>23</sup> He has also pointed out that despite the present identification of the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition with South India, the “pan-Indian character of the early sect has been obscured, because almost all of the extant works that bear the names of the twenty-eight principal scriptures of the Śaiva Siddhānta have been substantially altered or entirely rewritten in South India.”<sup>24</sup>

The *Somaśambhupaddhati* is an important Śaiva Siddhānta ritual text dating from the end of the 11th century, and includes instructions for performing a homa.<sup>25</sup> An examination of this specific homa highlights both similarities and differences between it and other tantric homa rituals. This text includes instructions for a ritual construction of the hearth-altar, such as digging up the site upon which the hearth is to be constructed, collecting the earth, leveling the ground, purification by aspersion, pounding the ground firm, sweeping the site clean, and lastly coating the site. These ritual actions are the symbolic representations of the actions required for the actual establishment of a hearth-altar, and are also directly related to other building rituals found in the region.<sup>26</sup>

Some tantric rituals employ the symbolism of making the deities present in the ritual enclosure by inviting them; however, the Śaiva Siddhānta text employs the imagery of a symbolic birth of the deity into the ritual enclosure. This involves the full range of sexual imagery, that is, impregnation, gestation, and birth, as well as the other rituals of childhood: Two deities (identified as Brahmā and Sarasvatī) are installed in the hearth-altar, and burning coals identified as Śiva’s semen are then poured in while the practitioner visualizes the act of impregnation.<sup>27</sup> By these ritual actions, Agni is born as the ritual fire in the hearth-altar.<sup>28</sup>

### Jain

Since the 1990s, scholars have turned their attention not only to the ritual traditions within Jainism<sup>29</sup> but more specifically to the tantric aspects of Jain ritual.<sup>30</sup> As part of a more general pattern of tantric development, Alexis Sanderson has linked the rise of Jain tantra—including homa—to royal support.<sup>31</sup> This suggests the desire for success in interstate conflict as described by Ronald Davidson.<sup>32</sup> Use of the term “tantra” regularly circulates around a fairly small set of characteristics, with scholars of different traditions creating somewhat divergent, though overlapping, usages. Citing the work of Shridhar Andhare, John E. Cort notes Andhare’s observation that “tantric rituals employ both phonetic chants (mantra) and visual diagrams (*yantra*, *maṇḍala*) and that there is usually

a close connection between the mantra and *maṇḍala* of any particular ritual.”<sup>33</sup> At the same time, Jain thinkers have argued that it is not possible for a Jina to be made present in the icon employed in *mandala* rituals. In this way, then, Jain rituals differ from those of other tantric traditions, such as the Buddhist, in which the deities are made manifest (evoked) in the ritual enclosure. Cort characterizes Jain ritual as working “as a form of reflexive meditation, in which the worshipper actualizes in him- or herself the supreme virtues that are symbolized in the icon.”<sup>34</sup>

Ellen Gough has studied Jain ritual most extensively, and notes that the ritual is performed in both the Svetambara and Digambara traditions. She informs us that the Svetambara use homa in conjunction with ceremonies of dedication (*pratiṣṭhā*) following the reading of Sakalacandrāgni’s text. It is also performed at the completion of the worship by a mendicant leader with a cloth mandala on which the *surimantra* is inscribed, as well as at the end of multiday worship ceremonies.<sup>35</sup>

In Gough’s judgment, the Digambara tradition performs the homa more frequently than does the Svetambara. One kind of ceremony that employs the homa as part of a larger ritual program is the worship (*vidhana*) of a mandala made of colored powder. These worship services are usually concluded with a homa that is performed in three hearths: circular, square, and triangular. While the number of hearths is suggestive of continuity with the Vedic tradition, neither the shapes nor the arrangement of the three hearths of Jain ceremonials are identical with Vedic. In the latter, the circular domestic altar (*gārhapatya*) is at the west end of the rectangular ritual enclosure (*prācīnavaṃśa*), the demilune southern altar (*dakṣiṇāgni*) is about midway on the southern edge of the ritual enclosure, and the offering or oblation altar (*āhavanīya*) is at the eastern end of the ritual enclosure.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the three form a rather flat scalene triangle. The three fires are identified with the three realms: the domestic fire with this world, the southern fire with the intermediate realm, and the offering fire with the world of the gods.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, the three Jain altars are arranged in a straight line toward the altar, triangular at the end farthest from the altar, square in the middle, and circular closest to the altar.

While these three shapes match shapes used in other tantric traditions, whether this similarity is significant or not is not clear at this time. Despite some similarities between the shapes of the altars and the continents of Indian cosmology, these similarities do not appear to be symbolically significant. Tadeusz Skorupski points out that “we have no tangible evidence to assert that they are related to each other, like the three Vedic fires are related to the three Vedic worlds.”<sup>38</sup>

## The Homa in Central Asia

The homa (Tib. sbyin sreg, བྱིན་སྲེག་) was brought to Tibet as part of the tantric Buddhist ritual corpus. As with other ritual systems, the homa can either stand alone as a ritual in its own right or be appended to other more complex ritual and ceremonial performances.

Stephan Beyer has noted in his study of the cult of Tārā that in some cases, homa may be performed with hundreds of offerings, and that consequently the ritual is continued over weeks, during which time the fire is never allowed to die out completely.<sup>39</sup>

The timing of homas is linked to the phases of the moon in some traditions of practice in Tibet. In Beyer's study of the cult of Tārā, he notes that since Tārā is a peaceful deity, only homas of pacification and increase are employed—subjugation and destruction being “out of character for her.”<sup>40</sup> Rites of pacifying are to be performed during the waning moon, while those of increase during the waxing moon, the symbolic connections being evident.

In the case of some Tibetan homa, the altar is a temporary one, in which case the construction mentioned in the section ŚAIVA in regard to Śaiva Siddhānta homa is literally performed, not only ritually. Richard K. Kohn describes the construction of a hearth-altar as part of the Maṇi Rimdu ritual cycle, earth being piled and pressed to form “a square about eight inches high and a foot and a half on a side.”<sup>41</sup> As in many other tantric homa, the hearth-altar is homologized with a mandala, and in this case a Maṇi Rimdu mandala is drawn on the surface of the raised bed of formed earth. Not only has the homa moved from one ritual culture to others, but at the same time it has also crossed the boundaries of different material cultures. This has in some cases necessitated substitutions, local materials taking the place of ones previously employed in a different setting. Kohn notes, for example, that at “Thami, where firewood is scarce, yak dung is used instead” in place of the sticks of kindling that form the main body of the homa fire. On the other hand, unlike Japan where sesame oil is used as a substitute for clarified butter (ghee), Tibet does have a dairy culture, and so ghee is available for use in the ritual.<sup>42</sup>

Christopher P. Atwood has examined the fire cult in Mongolia, specifically regarding the contested question of the relation between Buddhism and shamanism.<sup>43</sup> Although he does not refer to any of these rites as homa, Atwood notes that fire rituals in Mongolia are “fully integrated into the Buddhist pantheon.”<sup>44</sup> Within the more than twenty different types of fire rituals that have been published, he identifies three groups.<sup>45</sup> Most are household based, seeking to harmonize the family with national and cosmic orders. The second kind is a liturgy similar to many other invocations of Tibet and Mongolia. Atwood notes that neither of these is particularly tantric in nature, while the third category “are completely tantric rituals.”<sup>46</sup> He is specifically referring here to the rituals’

point-by-point description of how to dissolve the conventional world into emptiness and how to visualize the deity of fire out of the Sanskrit mantras, with her *uṣṇīṣa* knot of hair, white face, and other attributes typical of a Buddhist goddess.<sup>47</sup> The rituals then detail how to make these thus created deities deliver the various benefits and close with a confirmation of the presence of the deity in the fire and a dissolution into the mantra *oṃ ah hūṃ*.<sup>48</sup>

## The Homa in East Asia

The homa has proven to be highly adaptable, and three examples demonstrate different dimensions of this adaptability. The first is the creation of a Northern Dipper homa in China, the second is the use of the homa in the Yoshida Shintō tradition in Japan, and the third is the practice of large, outdoor homas by Shugendō practitioners, also in Japan. These three adaptations evidence two of the four kinds of borrowing described by Erik Zürcher in his “Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism.” There, he sketched a fourfold typology for categorizing the ways that one religious tradition borrows elements from another. He refers to these as formal borrowing, conceptual borrowing, borrowed complexes, and pervasive influence. While formal borrowing identifies items of literary and narrative style, conceptual borrowing involves the borrowing of a single element, such as one from cosmology or doctrine, but in relative isolation. The borrowing of entire complexes is “the absorption of a coherent cluster of ideas and/or practices.”<sup>49</sup> Pervasive influences are the most subtle and, therefore, most difficult to clearly identify. While Zürcher’s focus is largely on doctrinal and symbolic religious elements, these same categories can be employed to characterize ritual practices.<sup>50</sup> The adaptations of the homa described here are instances of the second and third kinds of borrowings, that is, conceptual borrowing and borrowed complexes.

Although the Northern Dipper is not important in the Sanskrit forms of tantric Buddhism, it was very important in Daoist traditions—whether understood narrowly as specific Daoist religious lineages or broadly as underpinning much of popular Chinese religion. We have argued that given these differences, a Northern Dipper homa was therefore composed in China, probably so as to be able to offer a ritual that met local expectations, and in direct competition with Daoist ritual practices.<sup>51</sup> The Shingon tradition retains a Northern Dipper homa as part of its present-day ritual corpus. The offerings made in the course of the Shingon Northern Dipper homa include a set of eight, one for the constellation as a whole and another seven for each of the stars individually. This may be understood as an instance of what Zürcher called conceptual borrowing. In this case, the Northern Dipper has been borrowed as a symbolic unit and adapted into the performance of a tantric Buddhist ritual.

The second and third examples are instances of a borrowed complex, which differs from the other kinds of borrowing described by Zürcher in that the coherence of the homa as a ritual complex maintains the unity of the practice and its meanings. In examining such borrowing across religious and cultural boundaries, the most stable part in the process is the structure. This is so consistent that it can be considered a principle of ritual borrowing, the principle of the conservation of structure.<sup>52</sup>

The Yoshida tradition of Shintō (吉田神道, also known as Yuiitsu Shintō, 唯一神道), was established in the 15th century by Yoshida Kanetomo (吉田兼俱, 1434–1511). It dominated Shintō from then into the second half of the 19th century, when Buddhism and Shintō were forcefully separated by governmental mandate. Kanetomo developed a three-part

ritual system, all three of which were adapted from Esoteric Buddhist practice. The third of these three rituals is known as the “Yoshidashintō daigoma,” or the great fire ritual of Yoshida Shintō. The basic structure of ritual actions is the same as found in the other homa discussed here—the practitioner comes to the altar, purifies the ritual space, ignites the fire, and makes various offerings into it, thus evidencing, at this basic level, the principle of the conservation of structure. The similarity extends further, however, to include the ritual accoutrements, such as the ladles used to make offerings into the fire and the wands used for purifications, as well as the use of mantra (written in Siddham script) and mudrā. Kanetomo did make certain changes to the symbolism involved, using, for example, a hexagonal hearth, and scheduling ritual activities in accord with the yin/yang dichotomy.

The Shugendō tradition of mountain asceticism originates in 7th-century Japan, drawing on indigenous beliefs regarding the mountains as dwelling places of the gods, local Shintō traditions, Daoism, and Esoteric Buddhism. In the 17th century, all Shugendō temples were required to affiliate with either Tendai or Shingon. In the second half of the 19th century, it was banned as superstitious and, therefore, a hindrance to Japan’s modernization, leading some to affiliate with the Shintō shrines that had themselves been separated from Buddhism. With the new constitution following World War II, freedom of religion became official policy, and several Shugendō lineages reemerged, now acting independently of formal affiliation with either Buddhist or Shintō institutions.

Evidencing its historical affiliation with Esoteric Buddhism, contemporary Shugendō maintains what is known as “saitō goma” (柴灯護摩). This ritual complex is borrowed from Esoteric Buddhism, but with some significant adaptations. It is performed out of doors, unlike Buddhist homas in Japan, which are performed inside temple buildings. Large logs, from eight to twelve feet in length, are stacked in the form of a square, filled with flammable materials, and then covered over with green boughs. The greenery produces a great deal of smoke, and in some cases, after the fire has burnt down the embers are spread for fire-walking, one of the “magico-spiritual powers” that accomplished Shugendō practitioners are expected to have attained. As with the other homas discussed, the basic ritual structure follows that of Esoteric Buddhist homas. Like the Yoshida Shintō homa, the Shugendō version also employs mantra and mudrā.<sup>53</sup>

## Functional Categories of the Homa

Although tantric schools of ritual practice differ in their specifics, there are common functional categories employed throughout. The number of such categories varies, however, including instances of three, four, and five, which are examined here.

Michel Strickmann examined two texts translated into Chinese by Bodhiruci around 709.<sup>54</sup> He identifies these texts as containing the earliest occurrence of the term “homa,” rendered phonetically as “hu-ma” and written with the same characters used today (護摩).

Strickmann glosses the names of the different functional categories in English as pacification (*śāntika*, 息災), “for assuring domestic and personal security”; augmentation (*pauṣṭika*, 増益), “for the increase of worldly goods and benefits”; and subjugation (*abhicāraka*, 降伏), “for the conquest of assailing demons or, indeed, human adversaries assimilated to demons.”<sup>55</sup> These different functional categories of homa are part of a complex ritual system, each “requiring a hearth of different shape and dimensions, special apparatus and offerings, and a particular spacial orientation and time schedule.”<sup>56</sup> To this list we can add color of the clothing that the practitioner is to wear as well.

In contrast to the texts examined by Strickmann, the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra* includes four functions. Tadeusz Skorupski has provided translations of the tantra’s description of each of the four, together with explanations based on Vajravarman’s commentary (T. 3453).<sup>57</sup> In his discussion of this tantra, Steven Neal Weinberger gives us the Tibetan, and glosses these as “pacification of illness and so forth (*zhi ba*, *śānti*), increase of resources (*rgyas pa*, *pauṣṭika*), control of others (*dbang*, *vaśīkaraṇa*), and violent subjugation (*drag po* or *mngon spyod*, *abhicāraka*).”<sup>58</sup>

In the case of present day-Japan, the different functions of various rituals are usually identified as five (*goshuhō*, 五種法). These five are for protection/pacification (*śāntika*, *sokusai*, 息災), for prosperity (*pauṣṭika*, *sōyaku/zōyaku*, 増益), for subduing adversaries (*ābhicāraka*, *gōbuku/jōbuku*, 降伏), for emotional affinity (*vaśīkarana*, *keiai*, 敬愛), and for summoning (*aṅkuśa*, *kōshō/kōchō*, 鉤召). Whether as sets of three, four, or five, or even eight, these categories originate in different tantric systems in India. The Indic origin is indicated, for example, by their use as general ritual categories, not only in Japan but also in Tibetan practice.<sup>59</sup>

Each of these functional categories is correlated with a variety of other symbolic factors, including the shape of the hearth-altar to be used, the direction that the practitioner is to be facing, the time of day at which the homa is to be performed, and the color of the practitioner’s garb, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Symbolic Associations for Different Homa Categories

category	shape	direction	time	color
śānti	circular	north	2 pm	white
pauṣṭi	square	east	dawn	yellow
abhicāra	triangular	south	10 am or noon	black
vaśīkarana	lotus	west	night	red
aṅkuśa	vajra	any	any	any

As alluded to, a more extensive list of eight functions is known from the Samvarodaya tantra. Shinichi Tsuda renders these as pacifying, increasing welfare, expelling and exorcising, hostility and killing, subduing and attracting, paralyzing and bewildering, expelling, and burning with fever.<sup>60</sup> The formation of a system of eight kinds may have been motivated by the sense of completeness from having one for each of the cardinal and intercardinal directions. Such correlations are found throughout tantric systems of thought, as well as in many other kinds of religious systems. The significance of such correlations as instances of metonymy is discussed in section RITUAL EFFICACY.

## Organizing Principles for Ritual Actions: Ritual Syntax

Homas are evocations; that is, they make the deities to whom offerings are to be made present within the ritual enclosure. They are found as rituals both performed independently and embedded within larger ceremonial activities. For example, Sarah Haynes found in the Tibetan rituals associated with Sarasvatī both instances in which the homa was a stand-alone ritual and instances in which it was integrated into a larger, more complex ritual performance.<sup>61</sup> Nawaraj Chaulagain has also noted that in Nepal, both independent performances of the homa and performances as part of ritual complexes are found.<sup>62</sup>

In addition, as a tantric ritual, homas also include an act of identification between the chief deity (Jpn. honzon, 本尊) and the practitioner.<sup>63</sup> These characteristics are reflected in the basic fivefold structure of Shingon homas, which Taisen Miyata has identified as purifying, constructing, encountering, identifying, and dissociating—ritual identification taking place in the encountering section.<sup>64</sup>

“Purifying” refers to the practitioner’s self-purification of his or her own body, speech, and mind—the three aspects of human existence in Buddhist thought. This step also includes such actions as the symbolic putting on of armor for the practitioner’s own protection. Preparation of the ritual space is the next step, “constructing”; the practitioner symbolically constructs the space within which the ritual will be performed and the hearth-altar upon which the fire will be built, and lays out and purifies the offerings to be made to the deities.<sup>65</sup>

The setting is now complete for the deities to be evoked within the ritual space, referred to as “encountering.” The deities are invited to the ritual; a jeweled carriage is sent for them where they reside in the cosmic mandala. Once in place, the ritual space is enclosed with walls of vajras and flames to protect the ritual from demonic interference.<sup>66</sup>

In most of the Shingon homas, there are five sets of offerings made during this phase of the ritual. These are first to Agni (Katen, 火天), the Vedic god of fire who purifies the offerings made into the fire and carries them to the deities, as discussed in the section INDO-EUROPEAN FIRE CULT. The second is known as the “lord of the assembly,” who varies according to the chief deity of the particular ritual. Thus, for example, the homa used for training of Shingon priests has Acalanatha Vidyārāja (Fudō Myōō, 不動明王) as the chief deity, with Prajñāpāramitā Buddha’s Mother Bodhisattva as the lord of the assembly. While during “encountering” the deities and the practitioner are understood to be separate from one another, in the next phase, “identifying,” this separation is removed. Identification is only performed with the “chief deity” (honzon, 本尊), that is, the principal deity for whom the ritual is being performed. Identification takes place in the midst of making offerings to the chief deity. Once identification is complete, the practitioner resumes making offerings—completing those for the chief deity and then moving on to the fourth and fifth sets of offerings. These are first for a variety of deities, and then for various protectors, a set of Vedic deities, and asterisms.

Completing the last of the five sets of offerings, the final phase of the homa is “dissociating.” This phase recapitulates in brief the actions that took place at the start of the ritual. Here at the end, this includes returning the deities to their original location in the cosmic mandala, transferring the benefits generated by performing the ritual, dissolving the protective boundaries of vajras, taking off the protective armor, and departing the ritual hall.

The symmetry of these actions at the end with those at the beginning is a regular feature of the Shingon homas, as well as other homas. We can represent this pattern in abstract as

$$A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D \rightarrow C^* \rightarrow B^* \rightarrow A^*$$

in which the central ritual action, “D,” is flanked symmetrically by the opening and closing sequence of actions (the closing actions marked by an asterisk). I have called the symmetry represented here, in which the actions repeated in the second half of the ritual are in reverse order, “mirror-image symmetry.” “Sequential symmetry,” in which the repeated actions are performed in the same order in the second as in the first half, would look like this:

$$A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D \rightarrow A^* \rightarrow B^* \rightarrow C^*$$

This simplified schema is only suggestive; in the actual homas I have studied, the actions are much more complex, and both kinds of symmetry are found.

As alluded to previously, the closing actions are usually performed in an abbreviated fashion, some actions being left out of more complex sets, or fewer numbers of repetitions of actions performed. I have called this “terminal abbreviation,” and like symmetry, terminal abbreviation is also a common feature of homas. Another feature is recursion, which was identified by Frits Staal.<sup>67</sup> As mentioned, there are five sets of offerings made in the course of most Shingon homas—to Agni, lord of the assembly, chief deity, other deities, and what are known in some homas as the “worldly deities.” Each of

these forms a complete ritual unit in itself, beginning with preparations and invitation of the deity, offerings in the middle, and leave-taking and closing at the end. The five different sets of offerings are therefore recursively inserted into the frame ritual. They would look something like this:

$$A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D^1 \rightarrow D^2 \rightarrow D^3 \rightarrow D^4 \rightarrow D^5 \rightarrow C^* \rightarrow B^* \rightarrow A^*$$

with  $D^1$  through  $D^5$  corresponding to the five sets of offerings made in the course of the homa. The consistency of these patterns, and the way in which recursion is employed for transforming one ritual into another, led Staal to describe this regularity as ritual syntax.

## Symbolisms of the Homa

### Interiorization

One of the distinctions sometimes taken for marking the shift of ritual practice away from the world of Vedic ritual practice to that of tantra is the interiorization of ritual. Yael Bentor has discussed the variety of this phrase has been used to identify. In her examination of Tibetan rites, she identified five kinds of interiorization. These are (1) fire offerings of breathing, inner heat, and the subtle body; (2) fire offerings of “great bliss” performed together with a tantric consort; (3) fire offerings of food (digestive fire); (4) mental fire offerings (imagination or visualization); and (5) fire offerings of enlightened wisdom, which destroys the mistaken conception of duality.<sup>68</sup> While some of these may be understood simply as analogies—because it burns away the mistaken conception of duality, enlightened wisdom is like the homa fire—traditional conceptions of the relation were probably stronger, that is, a kind of homologizing that faced in both directions. In other words, rather than simply an analogy, the ritual fire is enlightened wisdom and the offerings are one’s own misplaced affections and mistaken conceptions (*kleśāvaraṇa* and *jñeyāvaraṇa*).

Also, the interiorization of ritual was not a psychologization of ritual, but rather a turning to the interior of the body. Focusing on the period from the 8th to 9th centuries, Jacob Dalton has pointed out that by

the end of these two crucial centuries, a new ritual discourse of the bodily interior was in place. The tantric subject had become the site for the entire ritual performance; the body’s interior provided the devotee, the altar, the oblations, and the buddha to be worshipped.<sup>69</sup>

The process of reinterpreting ritual as a practice interior to the body was not smooth and uniform. The *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi tantra* (as known in Chinese translation) was probably compiled in the mid-7th century,<sup>70</sup> and thus predates the period to which Dalton refers. It also, however, evidences the interiorization of ritual. Together with the

*Tattvasaṃgraha tantra*, the *Vairocanābhisambodhi* became the central texts for the Esoteric tradition, Zhenyan, in China up through the time that Kūkai studied there and brought the two lineages<sup>71</sup> to Japan, establishing Shingon. After that time, the *Susiddhikara tantra* also became an important text in Chinese tantric tradition, and was brought to Japan by Tendai priests.

The *Vairocanābhisambodhi tantra* explains the importance of the internal homa as the unity in diversity of the fire, the deity evoked, and the practitioner:

One performs external *homa*, accomplishing *siddhi* [perfections, powers] at will.

Next, in one's inner heart that which is of one nature but tripartite, Three places [loci, in the sense of principal agents of the ritual] united to form one, represents the internal *homa* of the *yogin*.<sup>72</sup>

The sutra describes this inner homa as counteracting karmic action and rebirth, and in that sense combines the fourth and fifth aspects described by Bentor. Buddhaguhya comments on the inner homa, saying that

You should dissolve your five psycho-physical constituents [the five *skandhas*: *rūpa* (matter or form), *vedanā* (sensations or feeling), *saṃjñā* (perception or discrimination), *samskāra* (habits or conditioning), and *vijñāna* (conscious awareness)] into emptiness. Also the material objects, such as the external hearth and so forth, and likewise the perceptual awarenesses of the six senses which arise should also each be dissolved. Then preventing them from arising again, you should abide in the non-conceptualizing *samādhi*, [in which] even that *bodhicitta* which thus destroys and suspends them is counteracted by non-arising insight. That is the internal *homa*.<sup>73</sup>

The relation between the interior homa and the one performed physically is not universally agreed upon. Michel Strickmann, examining Yixing's commentary on the *Vairocanābhisambodhi tantra* (*Da rijing shu*, T. 1796) notes that Yixing

clarifies the scripture's implications regarding the true sense of Inner Homa. It is, first, a recognition of the identity of the divinity, the fire, and the officiant. Moreover it signifies the unity of the Three Mysteries of body, speech, and mind—in other words, mudra, mantra, and visualization of the deity ... [Quoting Yixing] "Thus in general the meaning of Homa is with the fire of wisdom to burn the kindling of the kleśas until all are entirely consumed." It is thus the Inner Homa, at the center of the rite, that confers meaning and efficacy on all that precedes and follows it—the Outer Homa within which it is encapsulated. And though the meditation may be used to effectuate various sorts of Homa, Homa performed without this meditative support is meaningless, even heretical: "One would simply be burning the kindling and vainly using up the offerings. Not only would one be committing a profane act, but moreover it would be devoid of all efficacy."<sup>74</sup>

Another adaptation of internalized imagery is also found in the Jain tradition. Paul Dundas quotes the *Uttarādhyaṇa sūtra* in which Harikeśa, a Jain monk of untouchable origin, explains to Brahmins that

Austerity is my sacrificial fire, my life is the place where the fire is kindled. Mental and physical efforts are my ladle for the oblation and my body is the dung fuel for the fire, my actions my firewood. I offer up an oblation praised by the wise seers consisting of my restraint, effort and calm.<sup>75</sup>

In the *Samvarodaya tantra*, each aspect of the homa ritual is given meaning. For example, white mustard seeds pacify calamities—an apotropaic function of white mustard employed in rites that Strickmann has called “proto-homa.”<sup>76</sup> Similarly, ghee brings about prosperity, sesame seeds destroy evil, corn brings wealth, and wheat removes illness. The list goes on at some length, but we note that the two ladles are identified with wisdom (*prajñā*) and skillful means (*upāya*), and that the union of the two is the practice of the non-duality of wisdom and means.<sup>77</sup> The bringing together of the two ladles, the smaller being placed inside the larger and in some cases rubbed back and forth, is also explained in terms of sexual symbolism.

## Sex and Fire

A great deal of commentarial effort has been given to the question of whether the transgressive practices, such as yogic sex, described in the tantras are meant literally or not.<sup>78</sup> In a detailed study of six early tantras Tsunehiko Sugiki has discussed what he calls “psychosomatic fire oblation,” which is an internalized form of practice employing the subtle body. Ideas regarding esoteric physiology form the conceptual ground for this understanding of the homa as an internalized practice. The kinds of practices studied by Sugiki do not clearly delineate between the different kinds of interiorization identified by Yael Bentor, but rather have aspects of subtle body, great bliss, and enlightened wisdom employed together. These internal practices also employ the phonic symbolism of “seed” syllable mantras (*bija mantra*).

Sugiki has shown that there was a progression from literal to symbolic forms of sexual yogas over the course of time. In these texts, equivalences are made between the implements and actions of the homa and the elements of the sexual yogas. In two of the tantras, for example, the small ritual ladle and the hearth are identified with the yogi’s penis and his female partner’s vagina: “Through the union of their genital organs the practitioner controls the movements of the winds in his body and ignites the yogic subtle fire. The yogic subtle fire blazes upward, burning up concepts such as ‘the five sense faculties’ (i.e., rice or offered articles) and ‘the five aggregates’ (i.e., firewood and fuel) that the practitioner conceives.” The process of interior transformations continues with the heat rising to the crown of the head, transforming the bowl of ghee there into the “awakening mind” fluid (ghee/semen): “The awakening mind flows downward in his body.

He offers the awakening mind to the vagina of his female partner(s) (i.e., hearth) through his penis (i.e., the small ritual ladle)."<sup>79</sup>

### Ritual Efficacy

Described in section FUNCTIONAL CATEGORIES OF THE HOMA are the associations of the different types of homa performance and the factors of the hearth-altar, time of day of the performance, direction the practitioner is to face while performing the homa, and the color of the practitioner's garb. These kinds of associations are very common, not only in tantra but also throughout religions. Since the theoretical disjunction of magic, religion, and science in the 19th century, such associative thinking has been dismissed as "magical thought," and like other culturally bound categories employed in religious studies, magic has (at least until relatively recently) been treated as unproblematically universal. Consequently, some authors have used the term "magic" in their discussions of tantric practice. For example, Stephen Beyer defines magic as "the manipulation of a distant object through control of a simulacrum that is in some way associated with it, whether by name, resemblance, or attribution."<sup>80</sup> Beyer seems to accept that magic can be used as a universal category, and applied in the context of any religious tradition, including the Tibetan tantric practices that he studied.

Several scholars have pointed out, however, that magic is a contrastive category, formulated as part of a three-way distinction among magic, science, and religion.<sup>81</sup> Wouter Hanegraaff has noted: "Because all traditional definitions have depended on an implicit or explicit contrast with either religion or science, the very concept of 'magic' appears to collapse together with these distinctions; any further use of it seems to imply support for scientifically untenable theories."<sup>82</sup> He does go on to point out, however, that the term has endured despite scholarly recognition of its contrastive nature.

While appropriate as an etic term, given the polemic role it has played historically, both inside the academy and out, it seems impossible to sublate magic as a universal category without introducing connotations from Western discourses inappropriately into discussions of traditions historically outside those discourses. The negative connotations entailed by the word deriving from the history of Christian theology, or the reactionary positive connotations from defenders of Western esotericism, make application of the category to tantric practices problematic. It has also carried negative connotations when used in psychological discourse, that is, as "magical thinking," a kind of unrealistic or even pathological belief in extraordinary means to wish fulfillment. The link frequently made between such associative thinking and ritual<sup>83</sup> further complicates the utility of the term "magic" by introducing cultural values dating from the Reformation (devaluation of ritual) and Enlightenment (positive valuation of reason). Laurie Patton has suggested that in place of magic, "it is more historically accurate and intellectually productive to name it metonymy, or more broadly, associational thought."<sup>84</sup>

Emically, most tantric traditions consider ritual to be effective because of the identity of practitioner and deity. This conception of ritual efficacy informs the practice of homa within these traditions, and distinguishes such tantric rituals as the homa from other rituals, whether conducted within a tantric tradition or not, that have a dualism between practitioner and deity evident in devotional or sacrificial actions. In some tantric traditions, the identity is created as a specific ritual action, symbolically central to the ritual, while in other traditions, such identity is established in an initiation preceding ritual practice, and therefore is not expressed as a distinct ritual action. In tantric Buddhist homas, such as those found in Japan, there is a threefold identification—the deity becomes manifest as the fire in the hearth-altar and is identical with the practitioner. Thus, the mouth of the hearth-altar is also the mouth of the deity and the mouth of the practitioner; the material offerings are the practitioner's own adventitious obscurations and are burned in the fire that is both the digestive fire and the fire of wisdom/gnosis. Tantric Buddhist thinkers employ the non-dualism of Madhyamaka thought, asserting that the body, speech, and mind of the practitioner is already the body, speech, and mind of the deity, as both are identically empty of any permanent essence.

## Review of the Literature

At the end of the 19th century, Hōriou Tōki published a detailed explication of a set of ritual manuals, including the homa, as found in the Tendai and Shingon schools of Japan. The work provides images and explanations of the mūdras and ritual actions for each of the four kinds of rituals found in the training of priests in these two traditions.<sup>85</sup>

Further study of the homa in Western language scholarship seems to have been taken up next in the last quarter of the 20th century. Translations of a variety of tantric materials have made the homa, as performed by different ritual traditions, available for both contextual and comparative study. An exemplary instance of this is the translation of the massive *Somaśambhupaddhati* by Hélène Brunner, which includes a chapter describing homa in the context of Śaiva tradition.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, the *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi tantra* contains chapters valuable for studying the early medieval Buddhist practice of homa.<sup>87</sup>

Interested in the historical and cultural links between the homa as found in modern Bali and its Indian predecessors, Christian Hooykaas examined the homa performances of Bauddha Brahmans.<sup>88</sup> His study gives a translation of one ritual manual and explicates the homa performance in Bali, both detailing the homa itself and the larger ritual and religious contexts within which it is found. A set of homa ritual instructions are found in Tadeusz Skorupski's translations of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana tantra*, and of a commentary on the same text by Vajravarmaṇ.<sup>89</sup> Michel Strickmann gave a historical and descriptive overview of the homa in East Asia in two works.<sup>90</sup> In both, Strickmann makes the methodological point that contemporary Japanese ritual and ritual texts provide an important resource for understanding the ritual life of Tang China.

The contemporary Tendai tradition of Japan was studied by Michael Saso, who gives a detailed narrative description of a present-day Tendai homa, along with similar treatments of two other rites of Tendai esoteric practice. Saso's work is self-described as preliminary, and as such provides little context for the descriptions of these rituals.<sup>91</sup> Richard K. Payne studied the homa as found in the other tantric tradition of Japan, the Shingon.<sup>92</sup> That work focuses on the homa, giving historical and doctrinal context, as well as providing a translation and detailed narrative description of one Shingon ritual manual. The work also outlines the other three rituals of the Shingon training sequence, which are given in appendices. These latter two works are similar to Tōki's early study, being informed by the set of rituals at the core of the training of a tantric priest in Japan.

To date, cross-cultural and comparative study of the homa has played a smaller, but we believe increasing, role. One consideration is the relation between tantric forms of the homa and the broader Indo-European roots of Vedic culture.<sup>93</sup> More focused is Holly Grether's works on the relation between tantric homa and the Zoroastrian *yasna*.<sup>94</sup> In addition to the historical and cross-cultural perspectives, the extensive spread of the homa provides a means of studying ritual change both across the boundaries of religious cultures and across longer periods of time than has usually been the case in the study of ritual change. While the individual essays are relatively focused on specific traditions and times, taken together the collection of thirteen essays by Richard Payne and Michael Witzel provides materials toward such studies.<sup>95</sup>

## Primary Sources

This article incorporates both a survey of the homa and my own firsthand research. That research has largely focused on Shingon (真言), an Esoteric (mikkyō, 密教) tradition of Buddhism found in Japan. While I have attempted to integrate as much breadth as possible in order to meet the interests of any reader, many of the specific instances or analyses will, therefore, naturally refer to Buddhist tradition, the Esoteric tradition within Buddhism, and the Shingon material with which I am most familiar. However, although the details may differ between traditions and religious cultures, my own studies have found extensive similarities of performance across a wide range of cultures and settings, so as to constitute the homa per se as a significantly coherent ritual practice. There are debates within the field of Buddhist studies regarding the nature and identity of the Esoteric Buddhist tradition. It is neither possible nor desirable to survey these here. I have found Ronald M. Davidson's use of the terminology of an "Esoteric movement," that is, not sect or lineage, most useful, as well as his thinking behind this terminology most convincing. See his *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*.<sup>96</sup>

## Further Reading

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## Notes:

(1.) For example, Teun Goudriaan gives a list of eighteen characteristics for tantra in a wide sense of "a conglomerate of ritual and yogic practices and presuppositions." See his "Introduction" to Sanjukta Gupta, Dirk van Hoens, and Teun Goudriann, *Hindu Tantrism* (Leiden, The Netherlands, and Cologne: Brill, 1979), 7. Similarly, Stephen Hodge lists twelve "features which characterize the spirit of Buddhist tantric thought" in *The Mahā-Vairocana-Abhisambodhi Tantra, With Buddhaguhya's Commentary*, translated by Stephen Hodge (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 4.

(2.) Francisca Cho and Richard King Squier, "Religion as a Complex and Dynamic System," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81.2 (2013): 357–398.

(3.) Technically, it is neither a closed system nor a fully open one, but rather what could be called a semipermeable one.

(4.) Don Ross, "Coordination and the Foundations of Social Intelligence," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Social Science*, ed. Harold Kincaid, 481–506 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

- (5.) Benoît Dubreuil, *Human Evolution and the Origins of Hierarchies: The State of Nature* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 87.
- (6.) Haim Ofek, *Second Nature: Economic Origins of Human Evolution* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 157.
- (7.) Ibid., p. 3.
- (8.) See Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 140.
- (9.) The entirety of this section draws on Richard K. Payne, “Tongues of Flame: Homologies in the Tantric *Homa*,” in *The Roots of Tantra*, ed. Katherine Anne Harper and Robert L. Brown, 193–210 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).
- (10.) For the Tendai instance, see Michael Saso, *Homa Rites and Maṇḍala Meditation in Tendai Buddhism* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1991), 59.
- (11.) Carlos Lopez, “Food and Immortality in the Veda: A Gastronomic Theology?” *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* 3.3 (1997): 11–20; p. 15.
- (12.) See Frits Staal, ed., *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar*, 2 vols. (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1983).
- (13.) For further details on this issue, see Timothy Lubin, “The Vedic *Homa* and the Standardization of Hindu *Pūjā*,” in *Homa Variations: Ritual Change across the Longue Durée*, ed. Richard K. Payne and Michael Witzel, n. 24 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).
- (14.) Richard K. Payne, “Ritual Syntax and Cognitive Theory” *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*, 3d ser., 6 (2004): 195–227; p. 211. This article demonstrates a negative instance, that is, arguing that the *agnihotra* cannot be the direct forebear of the tantric *homa*.
- (15.) Holly Grether, “Tantric *Homa* Rites in the Indo-Iranian Ritual Paradigm,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 21.1 (2007): 16–32; p. 16.
- (16.) Holly Grether, “Burning Demons and Sprinkling Mantras: A History of Fire Sacrifice in South and Central Asia,” PhD Diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2010, p. 55.
- (17.) Ibid., pp. 56–57.
- (18.) Holly Grether, “The Ritual Interplay of Fire and Water,” in *Homa Variations: Ritual Change across the Longue Durée*, ed. Richard K. Payne and Michael Witzel, 48 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

- (19.) Giovanni Verardi, *Homa and Other Fire Rituals in Gandhāra* (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1994).
- (20.) Ibid., p. 5.
- (21.) Alexis Sanderson, "Kashmir," *Brill Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, vol. 1, 99–126.
- (22.) Shaman Hatley, "Tantric Śaivism in Early Medieval India: Recent Research and Future Directions," *Religion Compass* 4.10 (2010): 615–628.
- (23.) Dominic Goodall, ed., *Hindu Scriptures*, translated by Dominic Goodall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), xxxi.
- (24.) Ibid., p. xxxiii.
- (25.) *Somaśudapaddhati*, translated by Hélène Brunner-Lachaux, 3 vols. (Pondicherry: Institut Français d'Indologie, 1963, 1968, 1977). The relevant section has been translated into English as an appendix to Richard K. Payne, "Ritual Studies in the *Longue Durée*: Comparing Shingon and Śaiva Siddhānta *Homas*," *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*, 3d ser., 13 (Fall 2011): 223–262.
- (26.) Payne, "Ritual Studies in the *Longue Durée*," pp. 232–234. See also Richard K. Payne, "From Vedic India to Buddhist Japan: Continuities and Discontinuities in Esoteric Ritual," in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, ed. Charles Orzech, Henrik Sørensen, and Richard K. Payne (Leiden, The Netherlands, and Boston: Brill, 2011), 1040–1054, esp. 1048–1051.
- (27.) Payne, "Ritual Studies in the *Longue Dureé*," pp. 234–236.
- (28.) See also Carl Gustav Diehl, *Instrument and Purpose: Studies in Rites and Rituals in South India* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1956), 124–129.
- (29.) See for example, Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Lawrence A. Babb, *Absent Lord: Ascetics and Kings in Jain Ritual Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996); and John E. Cort, ed., *Open Boundaries: Jain Communities and Cultures in Indian History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).
- (30.) See, for example, Ellen Gough, "Jain Mantraśāstra and the *Ṛṣimaṇḍala Yantra*," *Jaina Studies: Newsletter of the Centre of Jaina Studies* 4 (March 2009): 36–38.
- (31.) Alexis Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age: The Rise and Dominance of Śaivism During the Early Medieval Period," in *Genesis and Development of Tantrism*, ed. Shingo Einoo, 243 (Tokyo: Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo, 2009), 41–350, p. 243.
- (32.) Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 118–144.

- (33.) John E. Cort, "Contemporary Jain Maṇḍala Rituals," in *Victorious Ones: Jain Images of Perfection*, ed. Phyllis Granoff, 141 (New York and Ahmedabad: Rubin Museum of Art), 140–157; p. 141.
- (34.) Ibid., p. 144.
- (35.) See also Paul Dundas, "Becoming Gautama: Mantra and History in Śvētāmbara Jainism," in *Open Boundaries: Jain Communities and Cultures in Indian History*, ed. Paul Dundas, 31–52 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).
- (36.) The English glosses used here follow those of Frits Staal, ed., *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar*.
- (37.) Tadeusz Skorupski, "Buddhist Permutations and Symbolism of Fire," in *Homa Variations: Ritual Change across the Longue Durée*, ed. by Richard K. Payne and Michael Witzel (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 67–125, p. 72.
- (38.) Ibid., p. 72.
- (39.) Stephan Beyer, *The Cult of Tāra: Magic and Ritual in Tibet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), 272. Full description of a homa is found on pp. 265–274.
- (40.) Ibid., p. 264.
- (41.) Richard J. Kohn, *Lord of the Dance: The Mani Rimdu Festival in Tibet and Nepal* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 241.
- (42.) Ibid., p. 242.
- (43.) See also Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington, DC, and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993).
- (44.) Christopher P. Atwood, "Buddhism and Popular Ritual in Mongolian Religion: A Reexamination of the Fire Cult," *History of Religions* 36.2 (1996): 112–139; p. 124.
- (45.) Ibid., p. 124.
- (46.) Ibid., p. 128.
- (47.) Although Atwood refers to this deity as a goddess, the iconography may well be that of Agni. Unfortunately, the description provided is inadequate to make a definite identification.
- (48.) Atwood, "Buddhism and Popular Ritual in Mongolian Religion," pp. 128–129.
- (49.) Erik Zürcher, "Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence," *T'oung-pao* 66 (1980), 84–147; p. 87. Reprinted as "Buddhist Influence on Early Daoism:"

A Survey of Scriptural Evidence,” in *Buddhism in China: Collected Papers of Erik Zürcher*, ed. Jonathan A. Silk (Leiden, The Netherlands, and Boston: Brill, 2013), 105–164.

(50.) For a more extended discussion of this adaptation of Zürcher’s schema, see Richard K. Payne, “The Homa of the Northern Dipper,” in *Tantric Traditions on the Move: Their Development through Time, and Transmission through Cultural Space*, ed. David B. Gray and Ryan Richard Overbey (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 284–307.

(51.) *Ibid.*, pp. 296–297.

(52.) Richard K. Payne, “Conversions of Tantric Buddhist Ritual: The Yoshida Shintō Jūhachishintō Ritual,” in *Transformations and Transfer of Tantra in Asia and Beyond*, ed. István Keul (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 365–398.

(53.) For a fuller description and more detailed analysis, see Richard K. Payne, “Fire on the Mountain: The Shugendō Saitō Goma,” in *Homa Variations: Ritual Change across the Longue Durée*, ed. Richard K. Payne and Michael Witzel (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 337–370.

(54.) These are T. 951 and T. 952.

(55.) Michel Strickmann, “Homa in East Asia,” in *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar*, ed. Frits Staal, 2 vols., II: 434 (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1983).

(56.) *Ibid.*

(57.) Tadeusz Skorupski, “Tibetan Homa Rites,” in *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar*, ed. Frits Staal, 2 vols., II: 403–417 (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1983).

(58.) Steven Neal Weinberger, “The Significance of Yoga Tantra and the *Compendium of Principles (Tattvasaṃgraha Tantra)* within Tantric Buddhism in India and Tibet,” PhD Diss., University of Virginia, 2003, p. 213.

(59.) On the use of the category system in other kinds of rite, see Yael Bentor, *Consecration of Images and Stūpas in Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhism* (Leiden, The Netherlands, and New York: Brill, 1996), as for example, increase, 80, and protection, 207. On the pacifying fire offering as part of consecration rites, see p. 330.

(60.) *The Saṃvarodaya-Tantra: Selected Chapters*, trans. Shinichi Tsuda (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1974), 307–308.

(61.) Sarah Haynes, “In Praise of Sarasvatī: An Examination of Tibetan Buddhist Ritual in Text and Life,” PhD Diss., University of Calgary, 2006, p. 4.

(62.) Nawaraj Chaulagain, "The *Navarātra Homa*: Liver, Enchantment, and Engendering the Divine *Śaktis*," in *Homa Variations: Ritual Change across the Longue Durée*, ed. Richard K. Payne and Michael Witzel (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 314–336.

(63.) While most tantric traditions include ritual identification, there is an important, and importantly ambiguous, exception to be noted. In the Śaiva Siddhanta tradition, there is no specific ritual action of identification between the deity and the practitioner. This has been variously explained to me as a consequence either of the tradition being philosophically dualist or of the assertion that as fully initiated the practitioner already is the deity. These two explanations are not necessarily contradictory, of course.

(64.) Miyata Taisen, *A Study of the Ritual Mudrās in the Shingon Tradition* (Sacramento, CA: Northern California Koyasan Temple, 1984).

(65.) In his study of the *darsāpūrṇamāsa* ritual, part of the Vedic ritual corpus, Musashi Tachikawa describes this stage in terms of the creation of a "meta-world." Musashi Tachikawa, Shrikant Bahulkar, and Madhavi Kolhatkar, *Indian Fire Ritual* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2001), 21.

(66.) Although the ritual symbolism differs, this indicates a concern similar to that of Vedic practice, in which the second fire is set to the south as a protection against demonic forces.

(67.) Staal discussed recursion in several of his publications, including "From Meanings to Trees," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 7.2 (1993): 11–32.

(68.) Yael Bentor, "Interiorized Fire Rituals in India and in Tibet," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120.4 (2000): 594–613.

(69.) Jacob Dalton, "The Development of Perfection: The Interiorization of Buddhist Ritual in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32 (2004): 1–30; p. 2.

(70.) *The Mahā-Vairocana-Abhisambodhi Tantra*, trans. Stephen Hodge, p. 14.

(71.) There is an important and continuing discussion regarding the provenance of the dual tradition, that is, the pairing of the Vajraśekhara and Vairocanābhisambodhi. Shingon sectarian historiography has generally attributed the synthesis of the two into a unified dual system in which the two sets of ritual, text, and mandala are matched with one another to the founder of the Shingon tradition, Kūkai. There are, however, important suggestions that the pairing of these two specific tantric lineages was already in place at earlier dates, perhaps even being done in Indian tantric milieus. This theory is still preliminary, and depends on the interpretation of archaeological evidence, such as the finds at Famensi. These finds are, however, open to alternative interpretations.

- (72.) *The Vairocanābhishambodhi Sutra*, trans. Rolf W. Giebel (Berkeley, CA: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2005), 193. For alternate translations, see Michel Strickmann, “Homa in East Asia,” II: 438; and *The Mahā-Vairocana-Abhisambodhi Tantra*, trans. Stephen Hodge, p. 386. See also Koichi Shinohara, *Spells, Images, and Maṇḍalas: Tracing the Evolution of Esoteric Buddhist Rituals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), esp. chap. 7, “Yixing’s Commentary on the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*: Creating the Great Maṇḍala,” pp. 147–167.
- (73.) Hodge, trans., *The Mahā-Vairocana-Abhisambodhi Tantra*, p. 390.
- (74.) Michel Strickmann, “Homa in East Asia,” II:418–455, 443–444.
- (75.) Paul Dundas, *The Jains*, 2d ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 15.
- (76.) Strickmann, “Homa in East Asia,” II: 429.
- (77.) Tsuda, 313. Strickmann, “Homa in East Asia,” includes a photograph, II: 441.
- (78.) See, for example, David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), and Introduction, *Tantra in Practice*, edited by David Gordon White (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), especially pp. 15–18. Also David Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra (The Discourse of Śrī Heruka): A Study and Annotated Translation* (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2007).
- (79.) Tsunehiko Sugiki, “Oblation, Nonconception, and Body: Systems of Psychosomatic Fire Oblation in Esoteric Buddhism in Medieval South Asia,” in *Homa Variations: Ritual Change across the Longue Durée*, ed. Richard K. Payne and Michael Witzel (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 167–213; pp. 175–176.
- (80.) Beyer, *The Cult of Tārā*, 92.
- (81.) Stanley Tambiah, *Magic, Science, and Religion, and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
- (82.) Wouter Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden, The Netherlands, and New York: Brill, 1996), 80.
- (83.) As well as the all-too-familiar association between ritual and obsessional behaviors initiated by Sigmund Freud.
- (84.) Laurie Patton, *Bringing the Gods to Mind: Mantra and Ritual in Early Indian Sacrifice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 16.
- (85.) Hōriou Tōki, *Si-do-in-dzou: Gestes de l’officiant dans les cérémonies mystiques des sectes Tendai et Shingon* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1899).
- (86.) Hélène Brunner, trans., *Somaśambhupaddhati*, I: 230–277.

(87.) Two translations and a study of the work are of value in this regard: Stephen Hodge, trans., *The Mahā-Vairocana-Abhisambodhi Tantra*; Rolf W. Giebel, trans., *The Vairocanābhisambodhi sutra*; and Alex Wayman, "Study of the *Vairocanābhisambodhitāntra*," in *The Enlightenment of Vairocana*, ed. Alex Wayman, 1–205 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992).

(88.) Christian Hooykaas, "Homa in India and Bali," in *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of R.A. Stein*, ed. Michel Strickmann, 3 vols., II: 512–591 (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1983).

(89.) Tadeusz Skorupski, *The Sarvadurgatipariśodhana tantra: Elimination of All Evil Destinies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983); and commentary in "Tibetan Homa Rites," in *Agni*, II: 403–417.

(90.) Michel Strickmann, "Homa in East Asia," in *Agni*, II: 418–455; *ibid.*, *Mantras et Mandarins: Le Bouddhisme tantrique in Chine* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996), chap. 7, "Le culte Tantrique du feu," pp. 337–368.

(91.) Michael Saso, *Homa Rites and Maṇḍala Meditation in Tendai Buddhism*. On the preliminary status of the work, see p. 10.

(92.) Richard K. Payne, *The Tantric Ritual of Japan: Feeding the Gods, the Shingon Fire Ritual* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1991).

(93.) Richard K. Payne, "Tongues of Flame," in *The Roots of Tantra*, pp. 193–210.

(94.) Holly Grether, "Tantric Homa Rites in the Indo-Iranian Ritual Paradigm," pp. 16–32, and "The Ritual Interplay of Fire and Water," in *Homa Variations*, pp. 47–66.

(95.) Payne, Richard K. and Michael Witzel, eds., *Homa Variations: Ritual Change across the Longue Durée*.

(96.) Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

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